

## Slips, Trips, and Falls

### Meeting Objectives

To point out the danger of one of the most common-and preventable--causes of serious accidents and accidental deaths, and to explain practices to help avoid such accidents. The result should be increased attention to safety and a reduction in slips, trips, and falls on and off the job.

### Suggested Materials to Have on Hand

- Ladders

(Note: If possible, hold this meeting on the floor so you can move around and point to possible slip, trip, and fall hazards.)

### Introduction/Overview

We've all had the experience of slipping, tripping, stumbling, and falling. Usually, the only result is that you feel silly and perhaps get a scrape or bruise.

But falls kill over 12,000 people a year, about 1,200 of them at work. That makes them the biggest cause of accidental death after traffic accidents. They're also the most common cause of deadly accidents at home.

In addition, 33,000 people are disabled every year from falling on stairs. And many, many people receive lesser injuries: strains, sprains, broken bones, fractures. These can all keep you out of work and run up big medical bills.

Most of these accidents can be prevented if you look where you're going, know what hazards to look for, and try to maintain your work area to reduce the possibility that you or someone else will end up flat on his or her back.

### General Hazards

There are a number of common causes of slips, trips, and falls.

Ladders that are unsafe or are used unsafely are one of the most common-so common that they're worth a safety meeting of their own.

The other most typical causes are:

- Unsafe stairs
- Obstructions in walkways or on stairs
- Slippery or uneven surfaces
- Improper shoes
- Moving too fast
- Poor lighting
- Being tired or distracted.

But even more typical is not paying attention. You're in hurry or thinking about something else, so you don't look where you're going or at what's around you, and the next thing you know, you're on the floor.

So today we're going to try to help you recognize risky or unsafe conditions. With that knowledge, you can learn to focus better on what's around you, eliminate or work around what's unsafe, and always expect the unexpected.

## **OSHA Regulations and Frequent Violations**

OSHA is very aware of slip, trip, and fall dangers and has quite a few specific regulations designed to prevent them. It regulates ladder design, inspection, and use (29 CFR 1910.25, 26 and 27). And OSHA specifically requires floors to be clean and, if possible, dry, with drainage and dry standing places for wet process areas (29 CFR 1910.22(a)(2)). This paragraph had a total of over 373 violations in a recent fiscal year. The same regulation goes on to require floors and passageways free from protruding nails, splinters, holes, and loose boards.

In addition, OSHA goes into some detail on guarding floor and wall openings and holes. (29 CFR 1910.23). The bottom line of these regulations is that rails and other types of guards must be in place to keep you from falling. In a recent year, there were nearly 1,112 violations of 29 CFR 1910.23(c)(1).

These OSHA regulations seem like commonsense safety. However, not everyone seems to treat them that way. The general housekeeping regulation, "All places of employment, passageways, storerooms, and service rooms shall be kept clean and orderly and in a sanitary condition," 29 CFR 1910.22(a)(1), had 666 violations in a recent year.

## **Identifying Hazards**

Learning to identify the hazards that might cause you to slip, trip, or fall is the key to

avoiding these accidents.

**Stairs** should be checked before use to make sure that:

- Steps aren't slippery, worn, or broken
- Railings aren't missing or loose
- Lighting isn't too dim or nonexistent.

Report any such problems immediately and try not to use those stairs until they're fixed.

**Ramps and loading docks** should have handrails and nonslip surfaces. They also tend to get slippery if they're wet or if oil has leaked on them, so be alert.

An amazing number of slips, trips, and falls happen on level ground. The usual culprit is a surface that's wet or worn, so, again, be alert.

- I also want to just mention **ladder** safety hazards:

Loose or broken rungs or steps

Missing or broken spreaders, tie rods, and braces.

The most important thing to remember about ladders is to inspect them carefully before each use. And don't use a ladder that has any missing, broken, or loose parts.

## **Protection Against Hazards**

Your best protection against hazards is to **be alert!!** Look where you're going. Check the condition of floors, stairs, ladders, and the work area.

Be especially careful in places where the floor elevation changes. And keep your eyes open if you work around manholes and drains to make sure they're not uncovered. If there's clutter in your path, move it before you proceed.

Slippery floors are always dangerous. If they're waxed or polished, icy or wet, take it real slow. Other possible problems: oil, grease, or chemical spills, or floors made of tile, marble, or other slippery surfaces.

If the floor is wet, clean it up or report it. And always be more cautious than you think you need to be.

## **Safety Procedures**

There are a number of safety procedures you should follow to prevent these accidents. None

of them are very complicated and it shouldn't take very long before they become habits.

Many of these habits-to-be involve good housekeeping:

- Keep everything in its proper place and put things away after use.
- Repair or report any floor problems: loose or missing tiles, warped wood planks, turned-up rug edges.
- Keep walkways and aisles clear of obstacles.
- Keep drawers closed.
- Dispose of trash promptly and properly.
- Don't leave machines, tools, or other materials on the floor.
- Block off and mark areas that are being cleaned or repaired. Keep
- cords, power cables, and air hoses out of walkways.
- Clean up spills and leaks right away.
- Be sure there's enough lighting before you move ahead. If need be, use a flashlight.

The way you move, and even dress, can make the difference between getting where you're going and having an accident. Keep these tips in mind:

- Walk, don't run.
- Walk slowly, with a sliding motion, on slippery or uneven surfaces.
- Wear shoes with nonskid soles and flat heels.
- Beware of loose pant cuffs; you could trip over them.
- Don't carry a load you can't see over-especially on stairs. Keep
- your hands at your sides, not in your pockets, for balance.
- Use railings when climbing up or down stairs.
- When you sit in a chair, keep all four chair legs on the floor.
- Don't jump off platforms or loading docks.
- Step around obstructions.
- Don't fool around and engage in horseplay.

- Pay attention to where you're going and what might be in your way.

The last point is really the most important. **If** you look where you're going, you're more likely to get there in one piece.

One more thing: Sometimes, even when you're careful, you can fall. But you can still try to keep from being injured seriously by "falling correctly."

There are two ways to do it: One way is to roll with the fall. The other is to bend your elbows and knees so your legs and arms absorb the fall.

**If** you do fall, it's a good idea to get medical attention. You can't always tell if something has been torn, sprained, or broken.

### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. What are some of the most common causes of slips, trips, and falls?
2. What types of things does OSHA regulate to try to prevent slips, trips, and falls?
3. What hazards can cause you to fall on stairs?
4. What's most likely to make you fall on level ground?
5. What kinds of situations can make floors dangerous?
6. What are some of the good housekeeping practices that can help prevent slips, trips, and falls?
7. What kind of shoes should you wear to prevent slipping?
8. What's the best overall rule to follow so you won't slip, trip, or fall?
9. How do you "fall correctly"?
10. Are there any other questions?

### **Wrap-Up**

Slips, trips, and falls are among the most common kinds of accidents. Even worse, they're among the most common kinds of accidents causing death or disability.

So keep the work area clear--especially aisles, walkways, and stairs. Make sure that stairs, ladders, and guardrails are in good condition. Wear sensible shoes with nonskid soles and flat heels, and be especially careful around wet or slippery surfaces.

And, most important, pay attention. Check the areas you're entering. Look for hazards. Keep your mind on what you're doing and where you're going. That's the best way to maintain your balance and your safety.

## **Sample Handout**

### **Slip, Trip, Fall, Do's and Don'ts Checklist**

#### **DO:**

- 0 Check condition of stairs and fix or report the following:
  - Missing or broken steps.
  - Missing or loose railings.
  - Items left on steps.
  - Inadequate lighting.
- 0 Use railings when climbing up or down stairs.
- 0 Keep everything in its proper place and put things away after use.
- 0 Fix or report any floor problems immediately:
  - Loose or missing tiles.
  - Warped wood planks.
  - Turned-up rug edges.
- 0 Keep walkways and aisles clear of obstacles.
- 0 Keep drawers closed.
- 0 Dispose of trash promptly and properly.
- 0 Keep areas being cleaned or repaired blocked off and labeled.
- 0 Clean up spills and leaks right away.
- 0 Make sure lighting is adequate; use flashlights if light is too dim.
- 0 Walk, don't run.
- 0 Walk slowly with a sliding motion on slippery or uneven surfaces.
- 0 Wear shoes with nonskid soles and flat heels.
- 0 Beware of loose pant cuffs; you could trip over them.
- 0 Keep your hands at your sides, not in your pockets, for balance.
- 0 Keep all four chair legs on the floor.
- 0 Step around obstructions.
- 0 Pay attention to where you're going and what might be in your way.

#### **DON'T:**

- 0 Keep machines, tools, or other materials on the floor.
- 0 Leave cords, power cables, and air hoses in walkways.
- 0 Carry a load you can't see over-especially on stairs.
- 0 Jump off platforms or loading docks.